DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 480 370 CE 085 354

TITLE	A Blueprint for Preparing America's Future. The Adult Basic and Literacy Education Act of 2003: Summary of Major Provisions.
INSTITUTION	Office of Vocational and Adult Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2003-06-00
NOTE	14p.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text (MS Word format): http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/AdultEd/aeblueprint2.doc.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; Academic Standards; *Adult Basic Education; Adult Students; Cooperative Planning; Educational Finance; *Educational Legislation; Educational Opportunities; Educational Policy; Educational Research; Educational Technology; *Federal Legislation; Government School Relationship; *Literacy Education; National Programs; Program Administration; *Public Policy; School Districts; State Standards; Technology Uses in Education
IDENTIFIERS	Bush Administration; National Institute for Literacy; *Reauthorization Legislation

ABSTRACT

In preparation for reauthorization of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), the Bush administration outlined its vision for adult basic and literacy education. Key principles of that vision are as follows: (1) creating accountability for results; (2) funding that works; (3) expanding options and choices for students; and (4) reducing bureaucracy and increasing flexibility. The first area of focus of the Bush administration's vision is on the following improvement strategies: (1) hold local programs and state agencies accountable for student achievement; (2) require state-developed or state-adopted content standards and aligned assessments; (3) focus on what works by promoting local use of research-based practice; (4) provide increased options for basic skills acquisition; (5) expand appropriate technology options; (6) promote collaboration and resource sharing across agencies serving undereducated adults; and (7) coordinate service delivery through the One-Stop Career Center system. The second area of focus of the Bush administration's vision for the AEFLA is national leadership activities in the following areas: demonstration of cross-agency planning; technical assistance; evaluation and assessment; national needs assessment; and rigorous research. The third area of focus of the administration's vision is the National Institute for Literacy and its efforts to improve reading across the lifespan, math and English acquisition for adults, and technical assistance and training. (MN)

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A Blueprint for

Preparing America's Future

The Adult Basic and Literacy Education Act of 2003:

Summary of Major Provisions

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Vocational and Adult Education
Carol A. D'Amico, Assistant Secretary

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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June 2003

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bush Administration's Vision for Adult Basic and Literacy Education

Adults will have opportunities to improve their basic and literacy skills in high-quality research-based programs that will equip them to succeed in the next step of their education and employment.

The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) must be reauthorized before September 30, 2004. The Bush Administration is committed to reforming education in the United States. This blueprint outlines another facet of the Administration's agenda for education reform that began with the enactment of No Child Left Behind. This blueprint serves as an outline for the forthcoming Adult Basic and Literacy Education Act.

Americans need a strong foundation of academic skills in order to fulfill their roles as workers, parents and citizens, and to face the challenges of today's high-skilled economy. The U.S. Department of Education's proposed Adult Basic and Literacy Education Act of 2003 (ABLE) will make high-quality adult basic and literacy education services available to more adults by: creating accountability for results; funding what works; expanding options and choices; and reducing bureaucracy and increasing flexibility.

Creating accountability for results. Under the Administration's proposal, States must establish more effective programs that prioritize accountability for results by setting challenging expectations for students, using meaningful assessments, and aligning instruction to meet those expectations. Clear standards in core academics of reading, mathematics, language arts and English language acquisition; aligned student assessments; and appropriate performance measures will drive program improvement that benefits students. New local accountability systems will ensure that the most qualified and effective providers receive Federal funds.

Funding what works. An enhanced emphasis on research, as well as demonstration and development efforts, will build a stronger foundation of knowledge for the endeavor of adult education. Knowledge about how to teach adults reading, mathematics, and English effectively, how to integrate technology, and how to organize programs will lead to stronger student learning outcomes and more effective use of taxpayer dollars.

Expanding options and choices for students. Adults who make the personal investment in learning deserve a broad array of high-quality program options that best meet their needs. Under the improved adult education programs, a broader array of agencies will compete successfully to provide adult basic education services, including more community and faith-based organizations. Expanded employer involvement and use of technology also will create more learning opportunities for students, as well as create closer connections among educational programs to help students make smooth transitions to postsecondary education

and training. Enhanced partnerships with the One-Stop delivery system under title I of WIA will also assist in more effectively connecting students, providers and employers for purposes of the program and promoting smooth transitions to employment.

Reduce bureaucracy and increase flexibility. The ABLE Act will keep data collection burdens at a minimum, while still ensuring that the policymakers have the information they need to ensure accountability and program integrity. ABLE will create flexibility to facilitate new and innovative partnerships between adult education providers and other community agencies to make literacy services more widely available.

I. SETTING A NEW COURSE FOR ADULT BASIC AND LITERACY EDUCATION

Adult Literacy for the 21st Century

Tens of millions of American adults do not have the reading, language, computational, or English skills they need to be self-sufficient or continue adapting to the changing demands of the global information economy that characterize our Nation's present and future. The findings of the most recent national survey of adult literacy were published in the early 1990s. That survey found 40 million American adults (ages 16 and older) functioning at the lowest level of literacy, and 90 million functioning at the two lowest levels. These individuals are not equipped with the skills they need to work effectively in the high-skill jobs that increasingly characterize our economy. Millions of working adults, along with unemployed, dislocated, and discouraged workers need to upgrade their basic skills to find and keep employment.

The level of academic foundation skills demanded by the workplace and in society has continued to rise in the past decade. Today's job market demands that workers adapt as new technology is introduced, organizations restructure, and employment opportunities quickly appear and disappear. With the retirement of the baby boomers, projections are that the United States will have a shortage of perhaps 12 million qualified workers in the next decade.

Even now, immigrants fill about one half of the jobs created through labor market expansion. Many are highly qualified, but, on average, foreign-born full-time workers have significantly lower literacy skills than native-born full-time workers.

The Adult Literacy Challenge

The Federally funded system of adult basic and literacy education serves approximately 2.7 million adults each year. In addition to assistance provided under this system, adults have access to literacy instruction through other Federal, State and local programs provided at libraries, the workplace, community agencies and other locations.

To adequately address the national basic skills deficit, the Federal, State and local governments must engage the full range of entities that hold a stake in raising the adult literacy level. Low-skilled adults ought to have consistent high-quality service and accountability from all adult basic and literacy educational programs.

Based on the way adult education has developed in America, the network of basic education programs in States and local areas is not a cohesive education system. Programs are run by local school districts, community colleges, and community organizations and are funded by numerous sources – some Federal, but also State, local and private funds.

Further action is needed to improve the quality of service that will be responsive to the needs of adults. However, daunting challenges exist.

Across the Nation, thousands of teachers and volunteers work hard to help low-literate adults, and there are remarkable stories of individual and program achievement. Still, as a whole, there is little consistency or guarantee of rigor in the content or quality of instructional methods among the loose network of programs.

Given the data on State performance, it does not appear that publicly supported programs are adequately meeting students' needs:

- Only 35 percent of adult education participants complete at least one educational level within a reporting year. An educational level for the adult education system is measured by standardized test results demonstrating that a student achieved learning gains of approximately two grade equivalent levels;

- Only one quarter of adult education participants that enroll in adult basic education with the goal of attending college actually enroll in postsecondary education after leaving adult basic education;

- Of the adult education students who receive 12 or more hours of instruction, 29 percent drop out before they complete an educational level.

Elements of Program Quality

Adults investing their time in educational programs deserve consistent, rigorous academic content and effective instruction. To serve adult students more effectively, the ABLE Act will use resources more efficiently in order to provide high quality adult basic and literacy education services by: creating accountability for results; funding what works; expanding options and choices; and reducing bureaucracy and increasing flexibility. Through the adult education program's participation in the One Stop Career Center system, participants will have enhanced access to a wide array of programs and services.

Creating accountability for results. Under the Administration's proposal, States will establish more effective systems that make accountability for results a priority by setting challenging expectations for students, using meaningful assessments, and aligning instruction to meet those expectations. Clear standards in core academics of reading, mathematics, language arts and English language acquisition; aligned student assessments; and appropriate performance measures will drive program improvement that benefits students. New local accountability systems will ensure that only the most qualified and effective providers receive Federal funds.

Funding what works. An enhanced emphasis on empirically based research, as well as demonstration and development efforts, will build a stronger foundation of knowledge for the endeavor of adult education. Knowledge about how to teach adults reading, mathematics, or English effectively, how to integrate technology, and how to organize programs will lead to stronger student learning and employment outcomes and more effective use of taxpayer dollars.

Expanding options and choices for students. Adults who make the personal investment in learning deserve a broad array of high-quality program options that best meet their needs. Under the improved adult education programs, more agencies, including more community and faith-based organizations, will compete successfully to provide adult basic education services. Expanded employer involvement and technology also will make more options available to students, as well as, create closer connections among education programs that allow students to make smooth transitions to further postsecondary education, training and employment.

Reduce bureaucracy and increase flexibility. The ABLE Act will keep data collection burdens at a minimum. ABLE will create flexibility to facilitate new and innovative partnerships among adult education providers and other community agencies to make literacy services more widely available.

The Bush Administration's Vision for Adult Basic and Literacy Education

Adults will have opportunities to improve their basic and literacy skills in high-quality research-based programs that will equip them to succeed in the next step of their education and employment.

II. ADULT BASIC AND LITERACY EDUCATION PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The ABLE Act will build on the framework established by the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. The Administration requested $584.3 million in fiscal year 2004 for adult basic and literacy education including funds for State, local, and national programs. In addition, the Administration is proposing to reauthorize the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL). The Administration requested $6.7 million for fiscal year 2004 for NIFL.

After reserving up to 1.55 percent of the appropriation for national research and leadership activities, the Secretary will distribute funds annually to the States under a formula similar to the current formula. Governors will continue to designate a State agency to administer their State programs.

Part 1. Adult Basic and Literacy Education State Grants

States will use grant funds for:

- **State leadership activities.** States may use up to 12.5 percent of the State allocation for State leadership activities. For fiscal years 2004 to 2006, States that need additional funds to develop content standards and assessments can reserve up to 15 percent for that purpose.

- **State administration.** Up to 5 percent of the State allocation or $75,000, whichever is greater, may be used by a State for administrative expenses.

- **Workplace education programs.** States will use at least 5 percent of the State allocation to support work place education programs that are carried out in partnership with employers in order to promote greater private sector investment in adult basic and literacy education.

- **Local ABLE programs.** States will award competitive grants and contracts to local programs to teach low-literate and limited English speaking adults rigorous basic academic content in reading and language arts, mathematics, and English language acquisition. As in current law, States will operate correctional and institutional programs (up to 8 percent of the State's allocation).

Strategies for Achieving Improvement

The key strategies that the ABLE Act will pursue are to:

- Hold local programs and State agencies accountable for student achievement;
- Require State-developed or State-adopted content standards and aligned assessments;
- Focus on what works—promoting local use of research-based practice;
- Provide increased options for basic skills acquisition;
- Expand appropriate technology options;
- Promote collaboration and resource-sharing across agencies that serve under educated adults; and
- Coordinate the delivery of services through the One-Stop Career Center system.

Hold Local Programs Accountable for Student Achievement

Under the current program, States make multiyear grants to local education agencies, community-based organizations and community colleges, but often the grants are allowed to continue without rigorous oversight of how well students are doing. States need to account accurately for the outcomes of their grants and to fund the programs that get results.

- **Performance goals.** Each State will establish performance goals for each local program. Local programs will demonstrate student gains in reading, math, language arts and English language acquisition, student attainment of credentials, and student transition to postsecondary education and employment.

- **Annual performance reviews.** Each State will review the achievement of its grantees annually against the goals established for them. States will award grants for multiyear periods that do not exceed three years, so that all grantees must re-compete for funds during the 6-year duration of the law.

- **Rewards and sanctions.** States will be required to allocate grant funds annually to high-performing local programs, plan to help grantees improve their performance, and terminate grants to providers that are not achieving results.

- **Public reporting.** States will release to the public, through a report card system, details regarding how well programs performed and how well students fared in local programs throughout the State. This performance information will be disseminated through the Consumer Report system established under Title I of the Workforce Investment Act and made available widely to the public.

Hold Each State Accountable for Student Achievement

- **State performance goals.** States will reach agreement with the Department of Education on challenging long-term goals for improving student performance. States will submit six-year plans with long-term goals for the end of the six-year period for each performance indicator. The Secretary will approve only annual State performance targets that are sufficiently rigorous to ensure that the State will meet its long-term improvement goals. In consultation with the States and other appropriate parties, the Department will establish long-term national targets for the levels of performance for each indicator. In evaluating performance levels proposed by a State, the Secretary will take into account the extent to which the proposed levels will assist in meeting the national performance targets.

- **State performance measures.** States will continue to report student learning gains, GED and high school equivalency completion, transition to postsecondary education, and employment outcomes to the Department of Education, using common measures developed across agencies.

- **Performance indicators.** Adult education providers will be held accountable for the achievement of appropriate participant outcomes, including literacy and basic skills improvement, degree attainment, and outcomes achieved by participants after exiting the program.

- **Simplified common measures**. To ease the administrative burden on States and local providers, and to promote consistency in measuring the performance of Federal education and training programs, the Administration is undertaking a

common measures initiative that will establish four measures for programs that serve adults and four measures for youth and lifelong learning programs. Because adult basic and literacy education students pursue both education and employment outcomes, adult education programs' performance will be evaluated using both adult and lifelong learning measures. Measures of employment outcomes that are collected for adult basic and literacy education students will be consistent with the employment outcome information collected by other Federal workforce development programs.

- **Flexibility for workplace education**. Since workplace education services are typically shorter in duration and more directly linked to workplace objectives, accountability measures will be refined to reflect the specific goals of such services.

- **Rewards for high performance.** National incentive grants will be available to State Adult Basic and Literacy Education agencies that exceed challenging performance goals. The Secretary will reserve up to 1.75 percent of the annual appropriation for incentive grants. States will be required to reinvest the incentive grant funds in the State adult basic education system.

- **Sanctions for low performance**. If States are not meeting performance standards, the Secretary will work with them to develop corrective action plans. States that fail to improve their performance after two years of developing the performance improvement plan will be subject to sanctions.

Require State-Developed Content Standards and Aligned Assessments

Unlike in elementary and secondary education, few States have systems of content standards and student assessments for adult basic and literacy education. Content standards are clear statements of what a student should know and be able to do at specific points along an educational pathway. Assessments will be aligned with the standards and will be designed to provide valid and reliable measures of the degree to which a student has acquired the identified knowledge and skills.

- **State content standards.** Each State will be required to develop or adapt and implement educational content standards in reading and language arts, mathematics, and English language acquisition. Standards will guide local programs in creating a clear sequence of adult literacy activities leading to high school-level proficiency and readiness for college. The Department will hold States accountable for developing or adopting their own standards but will not develop or impose national standards for adult education.

- **Aligned assessments**. States will be required to align existing or new standardized assessments with State content standards so that programs can assess accurately student learning and achievement. The results of these assessments will

provide the data for reporting student learning gains—a core indicator of program performance that States must report to the Department of Education.

- **Alignment with postsecondary education and employment**. States will be required to align content standards and assessments with what students need to know to continue to the next level of education and employment. They will be expected to take into consideration the standards for elementary and secondary education, the standards for entry into postsecondary education, and the expectations of employers for entry-level workers.

Focus on What Works – Promoting Local Use of Research-Based Practice

- **Scientifically based research findings.** Local programs will be required to use scientifically based research findings to design their instruction and curriculum. States will be required to consider the local programs' use of research-based practices when reviewing agencies' grant applications and evaluating local program performance.

- **State capacity to support what works**. State plans will reflect a well thought-out approach to supporting local agencies in using research to improve instruction. States must ensure that teachers are trained in the use of research-validated instructional practices in reading, math, and English fluency. States must lead the effort to incorporate research-validated findings in instructional practice and materials.

- **Improve teacher quality.** State plans will require States to provide a description of their standards for instructional staff qualifications and how the eligible agency will provide and continuously improve instructional staff qualifications through professional development and training on scientifically based instructional practices.

Provide Increased Options for Basic Skills Acquisition

- **State capacity-building for new providers.** States will be required to strengthen the participation of community- and faith-based organizations to expand the availability of basic skills educational opportunities. States will be required to offer technical assistance to build the capacity of community organizations, employers, and non-traditional agencies that can provide adult basic and literacy education.

- **Workplace education partnerships with employers**. States will direct at least 5 percent of their funds to workplace education projects that are designed to meet the unique needs of participating workers and employers. Requiring the employers to increase their financial contribution over time will leverage more resources for

workplace education. States will assure that workplace education activities are designed in cooperation with the State workforce investment system so that they are coordinated with other workforce development initiatives.

- **Allow for-profit provider competition.** For-profit service providers will be allowed to compete with other local agencies to provide adults with high-quality basic education services in their communities.

- **Postsecondary transitions.** States will be required to provide students who complete adult secondary education or attain a GED the opportunity for a smooth transition to postsecondary education through the development of articulation agreements with colleges, academic counseling activities, and other strategies.

Expanding Appropriate Technology Options

- **State support of technology.** State leadership activities will include promoting the use of technology-facilitated learning and distance learning to accelerate student achievement and expand access to adult basic and literacy education.

- **Local use of technology**. Local applications will reflect uses of technology that promote student access to instruction, improve instruction, and accelerate student learning.

Sharing Resources and Services Across Agencies

- **State strategies for coordination and collaboration.** States must create a comprehensive approach to meeting the literacy development needs they identify in a State needs assessment, including how they will coordinate support services with other agencies and how they will meet the needs of individuals with disabilities.

- **One-Stop coordination.** Adult basic education will continue as a partner in the One-Stop Career Center system, with representation on the State Workforce Investment Board, by participating in the design and implementation of the system, by coordinating services with other One-Stop Center partners, and by delivering core services through the One-Stop system. Under the Administration's proposal to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, the Governor will use a portion of partner program funds to support the costs of One-Stop Career Center infrastructure taking into consideration the proportionate use of the One-Stop Centers by each partner, the costs of administration for purposes not related to One-Stop centers for each partner, and other relevant factors. The Governor, in consultation with the State board, will determine the amount of the contribution, except in States in which the constitution does not provide the Governor authority over adult education. In these States, the Governor and the adult education

authority shall decide the amount of the contribution. Funding for infrastructure costs shall be provided from funds available for administrative purposes.

- **Unified State planning.** State ABLE plans can be submitted as part of a comprehensive education plan or part of a unified plan with plans for workforce development programs.

Part 2. National Leadership Activities

The Secretary will be authorized to reserve a portion (1.55 percent) of the annual appropriation to carry out national activities. The legislation will authorize national activities that support the priorities in the Act as follows:

- **Demonstration of cross-agency planning.** The Secretary will use National Leadership funds to support a demonstration of cross-agency planning and coordinated adult education services. States that volunteer to participate will develop plans to increase adult literacy statewide and engage diverse public and private educational providers in improving the quality of their classes and services.

- **Technical assistance.** National activities will include technical assistance to State agencies, eligible providers, and other private and public organizations involved in the provision of basic and literacy education services for adults, particularly in the areas of performance accountability, standards and assessments, technology, workplace education, and professional development.

- **Evaluation and assessment.** National activities will support an independent evaluation and assessment of adult basic education and literacy programs, addressing issues such as the effectiveness of instructional strategies, learning gains and outcomes achieved by participants and the effectiveness of the Federal investment in improving student outcomes.

- **National needs assessment.** National activities funds will support the national assessment of adult literacy, including estimating the number of adults functioning at different levels of literacy proficiency.

- **Rigorous research.** Finally, funds reserved for national activities will support rigorous research that uses accepted practices of scientific inquiry to investigate the validity of theories and the effectiveness of practices in adult basic and literacy education. This research creates scientifically valid research findings that can provide the basis for improving instruction and learning.

Part 3. The National Institute for Literacy

Section 242 of the current Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (WIA Title II) authorizes the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL). The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) was created in 1990 to provide leadership and raise the visibility of adult literacy, and to facilitate collaboration at the Federal level. NIFL is administered under the terms of an agreement entered into by the Department of Education, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Health and Human Services.

NIFL has developed a strong connection with providers of adult literacy services through dissemination, professional development and technical assistance. NIFL also has created web-based resources and clearinghouses and has worked to synthesize reading research. Originally, NIFL was conceived to focus directly on adult education and literacy. Beginning with the Reading Excellence Act (REA) of 1998 and a special $5 million appropriation under that Act, NIFL's role expanded to include synthesis and dissemination of evidence-based research on children's reading, specifically related to the National Reading Panel. NIFL is now part of the Reading Partnership, a joint effort with the Department of Education and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) in the Department of Health and Human Services' National Institutes of Health.

The Administration proposes to reauthorize NIFL, focusing its activities on synthesis and dissemination of rigorous research on reading for children, youth and adults and mathematics and English acquisition for adults.

Organization Mission

- **Reading across the lifespan.** NIFL's mission will be clarified to focus on synthesizing, reporting and disseminating emerging research on reading and language arts across the lifespan for children, youth and adults.

- **Math and English language acquisition for adults.** NIFL will carry out these functions, as described above, in relation to mathematics and English language acquisition for adults, and will ensure proper collaboration with ongoing research relating to children and youth by other entities within the Federal government.

- **Technical assistance and training.** Upon request, NIFL will provide limited technical assistance and training in partnership with Federal agencies.

Administrative Issues

- **Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor.** NIFL will be administered under the terms of an interagency agreement entered into by the Departments' Secretaries.

- **Advisory board.** NIFL's Board will be nominated by the President, with advice and consent of the Senate, and will advise the Director.

- **Appointment of director and agency support.** The Secretary of Education, after considering recommendations made by the Board, will appoint the NIFL director and the Department of Education will continue to provide administrative support for the agency.

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